

PERSONAL  
REMINISCENCES OF  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY THOMAS LOWRY







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PERSONAL REMINISCENCES  
OF  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN





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Thomas Long

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## FOREWORD

THESE personal reminiscences, written in a fragmentary way by my husband during the last few months of his life, when he was confined to the house the greater part of the time, I have gathered together, feeling that the friends who knew something of his great admiration for Abraham Lincoln would be interested. Much of it came to him from close personal observation, and at a time when it was indelibly impressed on his mind and heart. It is this that would seem to make it worth while to those who knew him best.





## ONE LIFE, ONE LAW

WHAT do we know—what need we know  
Of the great world to which we go?  
We peer into the tomb, and hark:  
Its walls are dim, its doors are dark.

Be still, O mourning heart, nor seek  
To make the tongueless silence speak:  
Be still, be strong, nor wish to find  
Their way who leave the world behind—  
Voices and forms for ever gone  
Into the darkness of the dawn.

What is their wisdom, clear and deep?—  
That as men sow they surely reap,—  
That every thought, that every deed,  
Is sown into the soul for seed.  
They have no word we do not know—  
Nor yet the cherubim aglow  
With God: we know that virtue saves—  
They know no more beyond the graves.

EDWIN MARKHAM.



PERSONAL REMINISCENCES  
OF  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE following is a copy of a letter written by Abraham Lincoln regarding a case he had for my father in the Courts of Illinois. I have the original in my possession, and value it highly on account of my own personal relation with Lincoln at a later date, and for the great admiration I have for the man himself, as it is in some particulars very characteristic of Lincoln's true method of coming to a direct point, even at an early date:

Springfield,  
*17th August 1850.*

MR. S. R. LOWRY,  
Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 13th was received a day or two ago, and I now proceed to answer it. Your first question is "What is lacking to perfect a title on the part of the defendants?" Answer: The defendants, so far as I know,

do not claim to have any title, except a tax title; and this the court has decided to be insufficient, and I know nothing the defendants can do to perfect this title. I do not know what you mean by "the conveyances sent by mail." The deed purporting to be made some years ago at St. Louis, by Page (the Patentee) to Ryan, we had at the trial, and still have. That deed, in the hands of these defendants, was sought to be used as evidence of what the lawyers call an outstanding title, that is, a title owned by neither plaintiff nor defendants. The trouble with this deed was, that the plaintiff proved it to be a forgery; and I see no way in which the defendants can ever succeed unless they can somehow prove that the deed is not a forgery. This is the whole story. The case cannot be gained *by much* talking.

A new trial was allowed upon the payment of costs: and, until the costs are paid, the defendants are liable to be put out of possession at any moment the plaintiff may see fit to order out a writ, which, however, he has not yet done. The amount of the cost is \$25.82 cents, as the clerk informs me.

Yours etc.,

A. LINCOLN.

This is written on the old blue "foolscap" paper, folded as an envelope, and on the outside sealed with red wax and marked "Due 5c." This was at the time when the postage was paid by the receiver of mail at its destination.

As a boy I was always a great admirer of Mr. Lincoln, and my father was among his few supporters in Schuyler County. In the year 1856 or 1857, when nearly all the western State banks failed, father had a considerable amount in the notes of these banks and what they then called "Wild Cat Currency." Father and I started from our home in Pleasantview to Springfield with his currency about five o'clock in the morning and walked to Beards-town, seven miles, where we expected to take the through stage. We found it full to overflowing, and, as a result, walked to Springfield, something over fifty miles. After our arrival, father called on a banker named Ridgely, the grandfather of the Comptroller of the currency, William B. Ridgely, who recently resigned. Father sold his currency to Mr. Ridgely for about \$800 in gold. We then went to see Mr. Lincoln at his office. He received us very cordially, and among other things told us of his last visit to David F. Lowry, my

uncle in Pekin, Illinois, where he usually stopped when "travelling the circuit." Mr. Lincoln said: "As I was going up the path from the street to the house, some boys were playing marbles near the walk. I stopped and put my hand on the head of Mr. Lowry's boy and said: "My boy, you're playing marbles!" The urchin looked up and replied: "Any d—n fool ought to see that."

When the campaign opened in 1858 between Lincoln and Douglas, I took every opportunity to hear their speeches. The first speech I heard Lincoln make was at Beardstown, Illinois, 12th August 1858, where he spoke in a long linen duster. He showed much agitation, as Douglas had called him some very ugly names the day before, such as "infamous wretch," and other equally disparaging epithets. Lincoln had been informed of Douglas's remarks and was very much agitated. I think it was the only speech made by either party during that campaign where personal epithets were applied. Douglas's friends claimed as an excuse for his language that he was intoxicated at the time and that he afterwards apologized to Lincoln for his remarks, but this I only know from hearsay. Lincoln's reply was emphatic and dignified,

and I think it is conceded that his Beardstown speech is one of the best he made during that campaign. Beardstown (Cass County) was a Democratic stronghold, as was the entire central part of the State. The "Wide-awakes," the Republican organization, and the "Hickorys," the Democratic club, had a street fight that day which to me was very exciting. An Irish hand named Billy Herron, who worked on our farm, was there, and in describing the fight the next day said: "Ah, boys, I tell yez they give each other hell." Father's farm was seven miles from Beardstown, across and up the Illinois river four miles from Frederick and three miles from the river to Pleasantview. His farm joined the village of Pleasantview, and six miles north and west was Rushville, the county seat of Schuyler County. Lincoln spoke the next day at Rushville. The distance between the two places was thirteen miles. I have an indistinct recollection that Robert Lincoln met his father at Beardstown and drove him in a single buggy to make his speech the following day at Rushville. I wrote Robert Lincoln asking if he remembered anything of the kind, and under date of 31st December 1907, he wrote from Augusta, Georgia, and



in answer to that part of my letter said: "I was just fifteen years old at the time of the Douglas-Lincoln campaign, so I remember it very well. I am unable to tell you, however, whether it was that campaign I met my father at Beardstown and took him in a buggy with a single horse to Rushville, but it is probably true. I remember very distinctly that during the campaign he wrote me asking me to come over from Springfield with a horse and buggy to one of the places where he was to make a speech and thence take him home, the distance not being very great, but there being in those days, of course, no convenient transportation. The details of the trip I have entirely forgotten, except that I remember we passed through a region with which he was very familiar from his youthful experience as a surveyor, and on several occasions he stopped the buggy and laughingly asked me to go to a little distance in the woods where I would find a blazed tree, which he described, and which he had marked as a survey corner. As I say, he did this several times and never made a mistake."

I heard Lincoln speak at Rushville the day after his speech at Beardstown, where he spoke at the Court House, a building located



in the centre of the "Square." As Mr. Bagby, my law preceptor, was leading Mr. Lincoln up the walk from one of the streets, many society girls and young ladies were on the "green" beside the walk. They were all very prominent in society, and some of them were *very* dark complected. The name "abolitionist" was then an epithet of disgrace, and one of the darkest of the girls stepped in front of Lincoln and dangled a little negro doll baby in his face. He turned to her quietly and said: "Madam, are you the mother of that?" It created quite a sensation in that small town. Some of the old residents there will remember the incident, as the girls included the daughters of some of the most prominent men of the State, but I refrain from giving the names as it might give offence to some who are now living. After he began to speak they went upstairs just over the platform and tried to drown his voice by invidious remarks. Lincoln bore it all with patience and only occasionally made some scathing, though gentlemanly, comment. I am told now that some of those who are living and participated in these disgraceful proceedings are heartily ashamed of their conduct. I walked behind Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Bagby, and well remember the long, steady

stride Mr. Lincoln took. He has been described as having a wobbling gait, but such was not the case.

Mr. Bagby told Mr. Lincoln of a lawsuit wherein the most important witness was a celebrated Methodist minister, who had a very fine distinction of the definition of words. At the trial, however, he was not positive of anything, and matters that counsel knew he was perfectly familiar with, he would not swear to positively but would say "I think so," or "I believe so." Finally the lawyer became annoyed and said: "What do you mean by the expression 'I think'?" He answered at once: "That, sir, is the knowledge I have of my recollection of things of which I am not positively certain." He was then asked: "What do you mean by the expression 'I believe'?" Just as readily he answered: "That is the faith I have in the existence of objects of which I have a distinct recollection." Mr. Lincoln said: "He came out of the same hole he went in at."

Father and I drove from Pleasantview, Illinois, to Galesburg, eighty miles, in a farm wagon, to hear the joint debate between Lincoln and Douglas, on the 7th of October 1858. I stood on a little mound not far from

the speaker's stand, and heard every word. Lincoln stood tall and erect, with his left hand behind his back and made his gestures with the right hand, pointing straight forward. His voice was clear and penetrating, and, while seemingly not as loud as Douglas's, it could be heard at a much greater distance. In that debate Lincoln received the most applause as it was a Republican locality. I remember a story that Lincoln told at that meeting which is not reported in the joint debate. He said that when Douglas was in the south he was a Southerner, and in the north he was a Northern man. Illustrative of this, he told a story of a Yankee who had a pony that was very lazy. He secured a pair of large spurs, which had a good effect for a time, but as the pony got used to them, instead of starting up afresh with each prod, he would stick out one fore foot and lie down in the road. One day, in riding along the highway, a traveller with a fine horse overtook him. After a little, the Yankee bartered with him to trade horses. The man at first took it as an insult, but the Yankee persisted in telling the good qualities of his pony. About that time they were passing a clump of bushes and the Yankee saw some pheasants. He

stuck his spur into the pony, who put out his fore foot and lay down. The Yankee called out: "Hold on, stranger, pheasants around here. This pony is a hunter and setter. You go on the other side of the bushes and 'skeer' up the birds and I'll shoot 'em as they come out." The stranger complied and the Yankee shot a couple of birds. It so impressed the man that he finally traded for the pony and paid the Yankee some "boot." They changed saddles, and it happened the stranger wore spurs. The Yankee held back his horse until they came to a small stream which they had to ford. Fearing trouble, he let his horse go ahead. The traveller in mid stream put his spur to the pony, who put out his foot and lay down in the middle of the stream. The Yankee called back and said: "Don't be discouraged, stranger, he's just as good for fish as he is for fowl."

At that meeting, Douglas opened in an hour; Lincoln replied in an hour and a half, and Douglas closed in a half hour. When Lincoln arose to reply to Douglas, he began by saying he was getting tired of answering that same old speech of Douglas's. He made it at Ottawa, Freeport, Jonesboro, and Charles-town. The same old squatter sovereignty

doctrine, etc. When Douglas began his reply, he said: "I am sorry I cannot pay my friend Lincoln the same compliment he gave me. Of course I make the same speech and tell the same story all the time, but the trouble with my friend Lincoln is, he never tells the same story twice."

Mr. Lincoln told Judge Bagby that he was thrown in a wrestling match only once in his life, and added what has not been published: "I asked the man to show me how he did it, with which request he complied. Now," said Lincoln, "please try it again, and I threw him as easily as he did me."

Lincoln's election to the Presidency caused a financial panic, and on 10th November 1860, he wrote his friend Truman Smith a "Strictly Private Letter" in which he said: "I could say nothing which I have not already said. To press a repetition of this on those who have listened is useless. To press it upon those who have refused to listen, would be wanting in self respect. I am not insensible to any commercial or financial depression that may exist, but nothing is to be gained by fawning around the 'respectable scoundrels' who got it up. Let them go to work and repair the mischief of their own making, and

then perhaps they will be less greedy to do the like again."

The great speech Douglas made to the Illinois Legislature after Lincoln's election to the presidency, stamped him as one of the greatest patriots of the age. He had a friend named Robert P. Tansey, who had steadfastly stood by him and was his great admirer. He visited Tansey after his Springfield speech. In the conversation between them, Douglas asked Tansey what his Democratic friends were going to do in the approaching crisis. Mr. Tansey replied: "Our people are divided, many claiming to have friends in the South against whom they are unable to bear arms." Mr. Douglas arose from his chair and, striking his hand upon the table, said: "My God, Tansey, where in this broad land is the man to be found who has more and truer friends in the South than I have? But no man can be my personal friend and my country's enemy."

I have above outlined my own personal recollections of Mr. Lincoln, but in various ways I have come across the following Lincoln anecdotes which I do not believe have ever been quoted.

A story was told of Lincoln to the effect that he was driving a two-horse wagon along



a muddy road when he met a man coming in the opposite direction. The roads were almost impassable, and when a team got out of the trodden route it was almost sure to get stuck. Both teams were heavily loaded. The fellow called out to Lincoln and demanded that he turn out. Lincoln replied: "Turn out yourself." The fellow refused. It was near sunset, and Lincoln was between the other fellow and the setting sun. He began to rise from his seat in the wagon, at the same time saying: "If you don't turn out, I'll tell you what I'll do," and as he continued to rise and his tall form expanded between the man and the setting sun, showing his enormous proportions, the fellow called out: "Don't go any higher, I'll turn out." After he had passed Lincoln's wagon, he called out: "Say, what would you have done if I hadn't turned out?" Lincoln replied: "I'd 'a' turned out myself."

My father told me he was at the Chennery House in Springfield shortly after General Baker (afterwards killed at Balls Bluff) was elected to the Legislature of Illinois. Lincoln was entertaining the crowd and told of his meeting Baker a few miles from Springfield shortly after his election, sitting by the roadside, crying bitterly. Lincoln said he ap-

proached him with difficulty, as his horse shied, and when he found it was Baker, said: "What is the matter?" Baker replied: "Lincoln, I don't mind telling you confidentially that I am crying because I was born in England. If I had been born in this country, I am so popular I would have been elected President of the United States." Baker, who was very "high strung," was present when this story was told, my father said, and would not have taken it from any one but Lincoln, who was regarded as the best all round athlete in Central Illinois.

A story was told about that time of Lincoln when trying a case before Judge Harriet of Pekin, Illinois. Judge Harriet had been promoted from the office of Justice of the Peace to that of Circuit Judge. He was somewhat uncertain in his opinions and frequently responded to counsel: "I don't know about that." He repeated and emphasized the remark to Lincoln, repeating, "I don't know about that, I don't know about that." Lincoln looked at the judge and said: "I *knew* your Honour didn't know about it and that's why I told you." I have since heard this story as applied to a New York judge, but it was current in 1858 to 1864 about Lincoln.



In Curtis's "Life of Lincoln," he tells the story of Lincoln's answer to the question: "How long should a man's legs be in proportion to his body?" He omits the names of other prominent men connected with the story. It was when Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, and Owen Lovejoy were travelling in a stage coach on their way to attend Court at Bloomington, Illinois. Douglas had a *very* long body and very short legs, being only five feet high; Lovejoy had a short body, and long legs proportionately, and all know Lincoln's build. Douglas "chaffed" Lovejoy about his long legs and "pot belly" and Lovejoy retorted as to his very short legs, etc. One of them asked Lincoln: "How long should a man's legs be in proportion to his body?" and Lincoln replied: "I have not given the matter much consideration, but on first blush I should judge they ought to be long enough to reach from his body to the ground." Owen Lovejoy told me this story in Galesburg, Illinois, in the winter of 1863-4, where I was at school.

I was fortunate in 1883 or 1884 to form a close acquaintance with John B. Alley of Massachusetts, who told me of some of his recollections of Lincoln at Washington, among which were the following:

When Lincoln first went to Washington, he kept up his Illinois habits. One morning Secretary Chase came into his room and found him blacking his boots. Chase said: "Mr. Lincoln, gentlemen don't black their own boots in Washington." Lincoln looked up and said: "Whose boots do they black?" Also, how the "Monitor" happened to be built. The celebrated engineer, Ericson, who had tried long to get a hearing at the War Department, finally got an interview with President Lincoln. After going over the plans and discussing them freely, Lincoln said: "I feel like the girl who said when she put on her stocking, 'There's something in that worth looking at.'"

Another story which was attributed to Lincoln in those days and afterwards diverted to others, was that of Lincoln riding on horseback and coming to an overturned load of hay. The boy driving the team was quite "upset," and striving hard to right the load. Lincoln asked the boy to a farmhouse with him where he could get some help. After much persuasion the boy consented, and after lunch he said: "Dad won't like my being away so long," and started back to his load of hay. Lincoln said: "Don't hurry; I'll send

some help back to aid you." The lad replied: "Don't you know that dad's under that hay?"

Lincoln told my father about his first speech in Congress. He said he was always embarrassed when he got up to talk, and he felt in Congress about as elsewhere. He illustrated it by saying he felt like the boy whose teacher asked him why he didn't spell better. The boy replied: "Cause I hain't just got the hang of the school-house, but I'll get on better later." Arnold's "Life of Lincoln" refers to this, but does not tell the story.

The question is now being widely discussed as to whether or not Lincoln drank whisky. While I have no positive knowledge on the subject, I remember its being talked of in almost every gathering in that locality during the Lincoln-Douglas campaign in 1858. Many prominent men lived at that time, and before, in that district, and some of them in Rushville. Hon. Pinkney H. Walker, afterwards Chief Justice of Illinois, lived in Rushville until long after Lincoln's death. "Bob" Blackwell, the author of "Blackwell on Tax Titles," also lived in Rushville. Colonel William A. Richardson lived in the district, as did O. H. Browning, at one time a member of Lincoln's cabinet; also many others of equal prominence.

Some of these gentlemen had the reputation of partaking sometimes a little too freely of the "stimulating and sternugatory ingredient to replenish their concavity," and Lincoln was always held up as a teetotaler even by his enemies. I fully believe these were his sentiments. As early as 22nd February 1842, he delivered at Springfield, before the Springfield Washingtonian Society, a temperance lecture which is logical, unique, dramatic, and of a high degree of oratory. In that lecture he told this story: "Better lay down that spade you are stealing, Paddy. If you don't, you'll pay for it at the day of judgement." "Be the powers," said Pat, "if ye'll credit me so long, I'll take another jist."

It was told of Lincoln about that time that a New York firm wrote him, asking the financial standing of one of his neighbours. Mr. Lincoln replying, said: "He has a wife and baby, which together ought to be worth five hundred thousand dollars to any man. Second, he has an office in which there is a table worth \$1.50 and three chairs worth say \$1.00. Last of all, there is a large rat hole in one corner of his office which will bear looking into."

A branch of the Speed family, relatives of Joshua F. Speed, Lincoln's early and lifelong

friend, resided in Rushville, Illinois, where some of them still live. Mr. Mathew Speed of Rushville gave me this account of the first incident that led to the lasting friendship between Mr. Lincoln and Joshua F. Speed, as told by the latter. "In the spring of 1837, the day Lincoln was admitted to the bar, he rode into Springfield on a borrowed horse with no earthly property save a pair of saddlebags containing a few clothes. I was a merchant and kept a large country store, embracing dry-goods, groceries, hardware, books, medicines, bed-clothes, mattresses, and in fact everything that the country needed. Lincoln came into the store with his saddlebags on his arm, and said he wanted to buy the furniture for a single bed. The mattress, blankets, sheets, coverlid, and pillows I told him would cost seventeen dollars. Lincoln said it was cheap enough, but small as the sum was he was unable to pay it, but if I would credit him till Christmas, and his experiment as a lawyer was a success, he would pay then, saying in the *saddest* tone: 'If I fail in this, I do not know that I can ever pay you.' As I looked at him, I thought I never saw a sadder face. I said to him: 'You seem to be much pained at contracting so small a debt; I think I can suggest



a plan by which you can avoid the debt and at the same time attain your bed. I have a large room with a double bed upstairs, which you are very welcome to occupy with me.' 'Where is your room?' said he. 'Upstairs,' said I, pointing to a pair of winding stairs which led from the store to my room. He took his saddlebags on his arm, went upstairs, set them down on the floor, and came down with a changed countenance. Beaming with pleasure, he exclaimed: 'Well, Speed, I am moved.'"

The controversy between General Charles H. T. Collis and Robert G. Ingersoll as to Lincoln's religious views is well remembered. In a conversation with Colonel Ingersoll, he told me of his first visit to, and acquaintance with, Lincoln. It was soon after his nomination for the Presidency. Ingersoll was one of a committee from Peoria to call on Mr. Lincoln at Springfield. During the conversation the question of temperance was broached, and while Colonel Ingersoll did not say whether Lincoln was a teetotaler, it might well be inferred from his remarks. Ingersoll also told him this story: "During the administration of John Quincy Adams, a Congressional Total Abstinence Society was organized. It was popular for a time, but the in-

terest in it somewhat abated until the administration of James K. Polk, when he and his wife undertook to reorganize it. Many members of Congress joined and all the members of the Cabinet except Secretary Marcy, who refused on the ground that he was a moderate drinker. At an entertainment one evening where many ladies and gentlemen were assembled, he was pressed for further reasons and replied as follows: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I have read a great deal of history and poetry in my time, both ancient and modern, sacred and profane. I find in Homer's Iliad the gods represented as coming down upon Olympus and having a good time with women and wine. In Plutarch's Lives, the wise men of Greece and Rome, old Solon, Themistocles, and Lycurgus occasionally got fuddled with strong drink. In the Old Testament history, Abraham, the father of the faithful, gave wine to the angels. David, who was a man after God's own heart, said God had given man oil to make his face shine and wine to make his heart glad. Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness, got drunk, and his son Shem went backward and covered his nakedness. In the New Testament history, Christ's first miracle was to turn water into

wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Paul said unto Timothy: "Drink no longer water, but take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." And in fact, ladies and gentlemen, in all my reading I never yet have found but one man who was ever known to yell for cold water, and he was in hell, where he ought to be, and they wouldn't give him a d——d drop.'"

On the organization of the "Know-Nothing Party," it was claimed that Lincoln was a member of that body. The following is a copy of a letter written by Mr. Lincoln to the Hon. A. Jonas at Quincy, Illinois, on the subject. Mr. Jonas was the father of ex-Senator Jonas of Louisiana. The original is now in the possession of Mrs. Thomas B. Wells of Minneapolis, a sister of Senator Jonas. It gives the only clear explanation of his relation to, or connection with, that party I have ever seen:

Springfield, Illinois,

July 21, 1860.

*Confidential.*

HON. A. JONAS,

My dear Sir,

Yours of the 20th is received. I suppose as good or even better men than I may have been in American or Know-Nothing Lodges,



but in point of fact, I never was in one, at Quincy or elsewhere. I never was in Quincy but one day and two nights, while Know-Nothing Lodges were in existence, and you were with me that day and both those nights. I had never been there before in my life; and never afterwards till the joint debate with Douglas in 1858. It was in 1854 when I spoke in some hall there, and after the speaking you, with others, took me to an oyster saloon, passed an hour there, and you walked with me to, and parted with me at, the Quincy House quite late at night. I left by stage for Naples before daylight in the morning, having come in by the same route, after dark, the evening previous to the speaking, when I found you waiting at the Quincy House to meet me. A few days after I was there, Richardson, as I understood, started this same story about my having been in a Know-Nothing Lodge. When I heard of the charge, as I did soon after, I taxed my recollection for some incident which could have suggested it; and I remember that on parting with you the last night, I went to the office of the Hotel to take my stage passage for the morning, was told that no stage office for that line was kept there, and that I must see the driver, before

retiring, to insure his calling for me in the morning, and a servant was sent with me to find the driver, who, after taking me a square or two, stopped me, and stepped perhaps a dozen steps further, and in my hearing called to some one who answered him apparently from the upper part of a building, and promised to call with the stage for me at the Quincy House. I returned and went to bed, and before day the stage called and took me. This is all.

That I never was in a Know-Nothing Lodge in Quincy, I should expect could easily be proved by respectable men who were always in this lodge and never saw me there. An affidavit of one or two such would put the matter at rest.

And now, a word of caution. Our adversaries think they can gain a point, if they could force me to deny openly this charge, by which some decree of offence would be given to the Americans. For this reason it must not publicly appear that I am paying any attention to this charge.

Yours truly.

A. LINCOLN.

THOMAS LOWRY.

*10th January 1909.*



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